

HER ONE OPPORTUNITY

By JAMES BASCOMB

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Aunt Mary Graham, widow, who lived on the outskirts of the village of Bakersville, was all alone on that Thursday evening. The hired man had gone in one direction and the hired girl in another, and neither was expected back before midnight. The widow worked away at a crazy quilt until 9 o'clock and had just put away her sewing to make ready for bed when she heard the kitchen door open and shut. Then some one walked across the room and opened the sitting room door and entered, and she looked up to find a stranger present. He was a man of middle age, fairly well dressed. His face was not at all wicked, though it had a dissipated look.

"I beg your pardon for this intrusion," he said as he regarded him with a puzzled look, "but my excuse is that I have called on business and am in something of a hurry. I want what money you have in the house, and the sooner you hand it over the sooner I'll be gone."

"You don't mean that you are a robber?" queried the woman.

"That's what I am. I know you are alone in the house, and I hope you will hand over the money like a sensible woman and not provoke me to anger."

"Won't you sit down? I shall not scream or anything. I have heard about robbers ever since I was a child, but you are the first one I ever saw. You must excuse me if I have a natural curiosity about the matter. Is this your first experience?"

"Not by a long chalk. It's nearer my fifth."

"I am somewhat glad of that," said Aunt Mary. "A man who had just turned robber looks into my sister's house in Bakersville a few weeks ago, and I can't tell you of the mistakes he made. He had 50 cents in his purse, and he took that and left \$75 in one of the drawers of the sewing machine. She has real solid silver spoons, and yet he hid them aside and took the plate. The sheriff said he was nothing but a duffer."

"I'll try to clean up things in good shape," replied the robber, who had taken a seat on the edge of a chair and was twisting his hat.

"Our supper was over three hours ago, but I can bring you a glass of milk and a piece of pie. I will leave the door open so that you can see all the time. You'll feel better for something to eat. The robber took a spoon of milk and a whole pitcher of sour milk, when there were two pans of sweet on the buttery shelves before him. He must have been a very awkward fellow."

The robber nodded his head, and the woman fetched him a generous piece of pumpkin pie and a large glass of milk and paternally observed:

"Just make yourself right at home while you eat and drink. Did I understand you to say you were a married man?"

"No'm. I was married once, but my wife is dead."

"Was that before you became a robber?"

"Yes."

"I am rather glad of that. If I had a robber for a husband I should always be worried about him. Have you any children?"

"No'm," he snifflingly admitted. He appeared dissatisfied with the situation.

"That's good. If you had children you couldn't be with them much of the time, and if you got arrested they would feel bad about it. I don't want to ask too many questions, but as we are here alone I'd like to ask how you happened to become a robber."

"Look here, woman. I want what money you have in the house. I didn't come here to gossip."

"Of course you didn't," she pleasantly replied. "I know enough about robbers to know that they are always in a hurry, but I thought you might take time to answer a few questions just the same. You must remember that I never had a chance to talk to a robber before."

"Well, then, I couldn't make money at anything else, and so I turned robber."

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm paying my hired man \$10 a month and board, but he complains that it is not enough. He may turn robber any day. If he does I don't believe he will make any great success at it, as he is too slow. The only time he ever hustles is when he is washing up for dinner. I have been wondering if you wouldn't advise me about a certain matter."

"Madam, do you understand why I am here?"

"Yes, to rob me."

"Then hand me over what you can lay hands on. I can't sit here gabbling like an old woman."

"But there's lots of time," she protested. "You'll be clear to Spoonerville before any one knows I've been robbed. What I wanted to ask you about is this: I've been a widow for six years. I've had three offers to marry again. The last one is from Deacon Warner, and I've been considering it. He's a pretty good man, I guess, but he's got ways about him and three children to boot. He wants everybody in the house to go to bed at 8 o'clock and get up at 5. He wants fried pork every morning for breakfast and fried mutton every night for supper. He buys the cheapest kind of molasses, and he says that paper window curtains ought to last ten years. Don't you think most any wife would squabble with him about these things?"

"I guess they would," replied the robber.

ber as something like a grin crossed his face.

"And his three children—they'd make it warm for me. The oldest is a girl of sixteen, and I've heard she's ready to throw tin pans at my head as soon as I step into the house. You can never be a stepmother, but you can imagine what the situation might be. What would you do about getting married again if you were me? Some advise me one way and some another, and I don't know exactly what to do."

"I think you'd be a fool to do it, and now I want to get through here and get away. You don't seem to remember that I'm here to rob the house."

"Yes; I remember you said something about it," carelessly observed the widow, "but I wish you had a little more time to spare. Is it necessary that you be at some certain place at a certain minute? I wanted to talk with you a minute about my hired girl. Her name is Sarah Jackson. She's a good girl, but romantic."

"Hang it, woman! I'm here to rob!" exclaimed the robber as he rose up.

"Well, you can tell me about Sarah first, can't you? And the hired man—where are you going?"

"I'm going to leave."

"But you haven't robbed the house yet, and I wanted to ask you about."

And out he walked and left the widow wondering if that was the way of all robbers or if he hadn't met with some great misfortune to make him crabbed and cranky.

The Battle Ground of the Azores.

In 1580 the Azores came under the power of Spain, and in the history of the next twenty years their name is frequent as the favorite battle ground of the English and Spanish fleets. The partially was indeed mainly on the side of the former and for a good reason. These islands lay right in the track of all vessels sailing to and from that enchanted region known to all men as the Spanish main.

On the highest peak of Terceira, whence in clear weather the sea could be scanned for leagues around, were raised two columns, and by them a man watched sight and day. When he saw any sails approaching from the west he set a flag upon the western column—one for each sail. If they came from the east a similar sign was set on the eastern column.

Either in those days came up out of the mysterious western seas the great galleons laden with gold and silver and jewels, with silk and spices and rare woods, whence at the cost of thousands of harmless lives and countless unpeppable from the fair lands which lie between the waters of the Caribbean sea and the giant wall of the Andes. And hither, when England, too, began to turn her eyes to El Dorado, came the great war galleons of Spain and Portugal to meet these greedy corsairs and convey them safe to Lisbon or Cadiz before those terrible English sea wolves could get scent of the prize.—Macmillan's Magazine.

Maizie's Artistic Bent.

Maizie's father was a poet, her mother a painter, and everybody said that Maizie was sure to be a genius. It was her fate by inheritance. No one predicted the direction in which she would eventually turn, but when she was eight her Aunt Mirabel was sure she would be a great singer. What her uncles thought is of no importance. They had little or no imagination.

About the time that her aunt had settled Maizie's career Grandpa Wilkie said he had hopes of the child. "She'll turn out just like anybody," he chuckled. "See 'f she don't."

It seemed that first summer night on the farm as if grandpa had struck the right note. There had been a wonderful sunset. Maizie's mother, with half shut eyes, had compared it to Claude Lorraine's paintings. Maizie's father had looked lyrics, and the lay members of the family also expressed their delight in the scene. Maizie looked depressed.

"See her!" whispered Aunt Mirabel. "What exquisite feeling in her face!" Maizie's parents looked, but it was the grandfather who spoke.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Nothing," pouted Maizie, "only everybody's so taken up with the sunset, and I wanted to see the pigs fed!"

Can Dogs Laugh?

The celebrated French physiognomist Gratiolet admitted that dogs have what he called "the smile of the eyes." "The smile of the mouth," however, he regarded as peculiar to man. Scotch collies certainly seem at times to smile at sights which are comical, and on occasions at their masters.

Many instances have been advanced to prove their quick appreciation of a joke. One of these intelligent dogs used to look with a knowing air at his master when he saw a traveling bear, and his lips were drawn back at the corners and his eyes twinkled with quite a conscious smile.

Darwin recognized this sense of humor in a dog, and refers to its sportive play when a stick is thrown, which it picks up and almost allows you to recover before it darts away with it.

Mr. Lloyd Morgan tells of a retriever, a "jolly dog," which showed its sense of fun upon the sands, where it would bury a number of small crabs and bark with delight when, after waiting and watching, it saw a leg or claw emerge.

A Brisk Correspondence.

Mrs. Lamson was saying an affectionate and tearful farewell to her husband as she was about to start for a month's visit to her old home.

"Now, my dear," said Mr. Lamson in a pleasant but firm tone, "I wish you would try not to ask me for money every time you write."

"Well, I will try not to," said Mrs. Lamson, wiping her eyes. "But you— you know, Henry, that means I shall have to write even oftener than usual."

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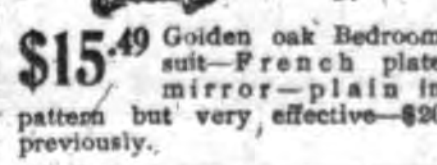
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